

Running head: EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

Education Transformation: The Challenge of Change at Fort Riley University

Federico J. Rodríguez, Ph.D.  
Fort Riley University, Fort Riley, Kansas

24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mech) & Fort Riley Kansas

## Abstract

*“Education Transformation: The Challenge of Change at Fort Riley University”* examines how we, as educators at Fort Riley University, support our troops at America’s Warfighting Center. We are preparing individual soldiers to meet the challenge of today’s Army as the military undergoes transformation. The article also addresses the civilian workforce which requires high-performance individuals with multiple and integrated talents capable of adapting quickly to a changing Army mission. Transformative learning, both for the military and civilian workforce, implies becoming more reflective, critical, responsive, innovative, and willing to adapt to and embrace change.

## Education Transformation: The Challenge of Change at Fort Riley University

TRADOC Commander, General Kevin Byrnes, recently published an article about the Army Future Force Concept with particular emphasis on “providing a vivid picture of how the Future Force will conduct land operations in the future, fully integrated within a rapidly evolving joint framework” (Byrnes, 2003, p.1). In order to effectively support the changing mission of the Army, the civilian workforce will also require transformation. The challenge is to develop an organizational climate that renews rather than reacts to the change. By developing a multi-skilled and technologically sophisticated workforce, the culture embraces change because the vision is on the future. Methods and techniques adapt to change, and leaders seek innovative solutions that incorporate opportunities to realize that vision, rather than manage by crisis.

Similarly, the transformation and adaptation message was echoed in August 2003 at the Acquisition Senior Leaders’ Conference. The panel discussing the Synchronization and Integration of Army Transformation concluded that the Army acquisition is moving into a new collaborative environment involving the user community, the material community, the Pentagon and virtual environments. “We’re increasing the degree we are going to have to synchronize and integrate.” The panel added, “If transformation is about anything, it’s about beginnings, not endings” (Williams, 2002, P.29). The panelists advised those assembled that the way to do business in the future must not be vertical stovepipe processes, but rather horizontally integrated organizations and that the planning must include network connectivity.

### **The Vision.**

There is growing consensus among educators, military leaders and policy-makers that current leadership programs for training future leaders must change dramatically. A different approach is needed if we are to prepare military leaders to meet today’s leadership challenges. The new structure should enhance preparation, allowing for innovation and futuristic thinking in a collaborative setting, as well as prepare leaders to meet new challenges (Rodríguez, 2001).

This insight by senior leaders encourages dialogue and could be enhanced by a series of ‘forums’ throughout the military community to discuss what needs to be done to improve leadership preparation programs. Instead of ‘management’ or ‘administration,’ what is needed is leadership,” says Day (2000, p. 56). General Byrnes suggests that the leadership that’s needed is not the traditional leader/follower relationship, but a newer, more democratic type in which individuals are not only motivated but also empowered.

Leadership capacity must be developed in teams of leaders, not simply in one individual. These “partnership leadership leaders” all have critical roles in helping soldiers perform at high performance levels. This focus on “multiple” leadership recognizes that the effectiveness of new leadership depends on “ownership” by all participants. Leadership skills should be fully developed so that future leaders have a strong foundation and belief system on which to base difficult decisions.

Likewise, today’s civilian workforce also requires high-performance individuals with multiple and integrated talents capable of adapting quickly to a changing Army mission. In the future, an increasingly essential dimension of leadership in the civilian workforce will be the ability to communicate and collaborate with people inside and outside of their organization. Today, effective organizations are guided by an instructional leader who directly involves staff in

the decision-making process, and by a leader who is able to provide guidance, support, and encouragement to team members when requested. Leadership should be seen as a shared process involving leaders, their entire workforce, and community members. Empowerment is a very comprehensive, dynamic process that also has the potential to substantially impact an organization to develop high performance individuals. Recognizing the need to develop the ideal of leading with vision and values, and empowering every individual is key to promoting shared arrangements and decision-making.

“Educational institutions throughout the Army, should be examining the changing demands and qualities for leadership,” stated the participants at the Fort Riley University 2003 Forum (Rodríguez, p.1), Dean’s Leadership Forum. They should be outlining bold, new leadership programs that embrace vision, risk, and change. They should be promoting programs that motivate and empower future leaders. Emphasis on this essence of leadership needs to guide the Army’s transformation.

### **Transformation at Fort Riley University?**

Fort Riley University is in the process of examining its own transformation. Included in that examination is the identification of constantly evolving demands that shape and define the transformation, as well as the identification of effective leadership qualities to foster that change. The major dimension of leadership is its ethical commitment. FRU is developing a framework for enhancing ethical leadership while working complex collaborative initiatives. To set the groundwork, a series of leadership forums were initiated to encourage communication and integration. The Garrison Commander, Assistant Garrison Commander, the President of the Fort Riley Union (American Federation of Government Employees, Local 2324--AFL/CIO), the Human Resource Specialist (Labor Relations), Fort Riley, and the Director of the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center were invited to provide mutual support and clarification of purpose.

The first Fort Riley University quarterly Forum was held 16 October 2003, with the theme of team building and empowerment. The meeting began with discussion of Fort Riley Commanding General’s Priorities, the Garrison Commander’s Mission Statement, and the Fort Riley University Paradigm. Clarification of these priorities, missions, and visions allowed FRU to begin to build on a clearly defined foundation. The presentation defined empowerment and shared decision-making, collaborative decision-making, leadership skills, organizational structure, and ethical leadership (Rodríguez, 2003).

Roundtable discussions followed with a representative from each group summarizing respective thoughts on leadership and/or the Army Values. The discussions resulted in many recommendations for the future of the organization and the expectations envisioned. One participant stated that “it was a great opportunity to share ideas and create some interest in who we are, what we are about and where we are going.” Another colleague stated: “I felt the format and progression of the staff meeting was beneficial and rewarding. I came away with a better understanding of the Fort Riley University operation and the missions we support, although there is still a great deal more to learn. Good emphasis on serving the soldiers, which undoubtedly is our most important mission. Also it was extremely important to have Fort Riley leaders present, ... as they must grasp the investment they have in the future and success of Fort Riley University” (Rodríguez, 2003, p.1).

Other highlights from the roundtable discussions included support for the encouragement of open communication, building of trust, importance of team decision-making, the difference

between micromanagement and empowerment, working together towards a common goal, enlightened and progressive leadership, and inter-departmental team building.

A number of recommendations surfaced at this forum. Perhaps one of the strongest recommendations was to continue to request that the Fort Riley Garrison and Deputy Garrison Commanders be represented at these forums. There was consensus that this is paramount to demonstrate their concern and support for the challenging task involved with transformation. Moreover, the President of the Fort Riley Employees Union and the Labor Relations Specialist applauded these initiatives.

Fort Riley University has since that time, initiated a series of transformation initiatives and advancements to enhance collaborative relationships at Fort Riley and the surrounding community. Some examples are the ambassadors-at-large initiative that aligns the senior NCO leadership with the university, outreach initiatives with commander and group leaders spouses that extend FRU's outreach to all segments of the command, and radio/TV spots being aired community-wide to link FRU with the entire community. The first FRU Handbook has been published and "The Dean's Corner", a quarterly publication, is being shared worldwide via the Internet.

The FRU Consortium, consisting of Barton County Community College, Central Texas College, Upper Iowa University, and Central Michigan University, is show-casing best practices. This consortium of institutions of higher learning is at the forefront of transformation and providing the educational leadership at a most critical time in U.S. history. Several innovative and revolutionary instructional delivery methods have been recently introduced at Fort Riley to address globalization and the changing needs of today's Army students. In January 2004, Barton County Community College will be offering Fort Riley students an Introduction to Networking class taught from their Great Bend campus via ITV. Continued interest in the degree program will result in offering courses leading to an AAS in Business Technology – Networking Specialist. To accommodate the learning of soldiers who have been deployed to areas with limited Internet access or expensive connectivity costs, Central Texas College has developed a remote access delivery system utilizing CD's. This system contains the same quality of content as the on-site classes. In addition, the CD classes provide instructor guidance, testing instruments, portability, and flexibility despite demands of deployment and mission. Upper Iowa and Central Michigan Universities are engaged in curriculum development initiatives that will benefit the "Total Army Family." These transformative initiatives allow the Dean of Fort Riley University, entrusted to serve as the chief academic leader within the Fort Riley community, the ability of orchestrating and providing the leadership for all on- and off-duty education programs—providing educational opportunities for over 20,000 active duty soldiers, Department of the Army civilians, and family members. These many collaborative arrangements further enhance creative and innovative academic activities within the Fort Riley University Consortium of Colleges and Universities.

Lastly, a more dynamic, synergistic integrated FRU leadership team model is being developed to provide "a greater opportunity to share ideas and create interest in who we are, what we are about and where we are going," as was so eloquently expressed by a FRU colleague. The model calls for a hierarchical developmental approach leading to a FRU integrated team.

## **What Does All This Mean?**

In order to be a collaborative leader one must be able to inspire commitment, be a peer problem solver, inspire hope, and build broad-based support through trust. Ketelle (2001) states that building community can be viewed as an engagement that initiates a series of transformative events that encourage collaboration. Molino (2001) further highlights that building networks of collective dialogue can help to create trust and cooperation.

Fort Riley University's major interest, collaborative decision-making in a democratic setting, is the foundation that will characterize all FRU initiatives. FRU collaborative initiatives will inspire the faculty and staff to become their own leaders. These professionals are being mentored in the design and development of their vision for change. A more democratic leadership approach in which individuals are motivated and empowered is being promoted. FRU is developing a change in organizational culture where leadership is viewed as power with people, not over people.

In support of this thesis one scholar argues that it is not possible to preserve our free institutions and build a better society in our democracy if we have forgotten our history and the price that was paid for democracy. Merely enjoying democracy does not guarantee its perpetuation. Other scholars feel that the greatest challenge facing us today is to help our future leaders understand the vital link between leadership and those values that sustain a democratic society—and, most important, a good society (Yates, 1999). Ethical leadership and democracy through education are key in this era of globalization.

As the senior military leaders have stated, it is clear that transformation will require each person to be measured by the individual's vision of the future. We cannot afford to dwell upon the past. We cannot afford to dwell upon the present either, for that too will be gone. Hence, FRU is preparing leaders with bold and adventurous ideas who possess the passion to take vision to implementation. One of the major briefing slides presented at the FRU Forum was "Imagination: developing the ability to capture the imagination of others to facilitate transformation." FRU is preparing a group of leaders who can listen to others and who have the ability to capture the imagination of those who also want to contribute creative and innovative ideas for a shared vision of the future.

FRU is developing high performers capable of adapting quickly to a changing Army mission supporting the Commanding General's Priorities at Fort Riley. Vision is not seeing things as they are, but as they will be!

## **Transformative Learning Justified!**

Transformative learning implies becoming more reflective and critical; being more open to perception of others and accepting of new ideas. To fully support the mission, you must prove yourself everyday as masters of innovation.

FRU would like to be viewed as an organization that supports this concept of leadership through the training readiness of service members and civilian workforce, and by promoting a more collaborative leadership approach that motivates and empowers. Educational opportunities that enhance critical thinking skills, intellectual reasoning attributes, and analytical traits are absolutely essential for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

FRU is developing high performers capable of adapting quickly to a changing Army mission supporting the Commanding General's Priorities at America's Warfighting Center—the

24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Mech) & Fort Riley Kansas. Vision is not seeing things as they are, but as they will be!

## References

- Byrnes, K.P. (2003, August). The army future force: Decisive 21<sup>st</sup> century landpower. United States Training and Doctrine Command, 25, 1-5.
- Day, C. (2000). Beyond transformational leadership. Educational Leadership, 48, 56-59.
- Foster, W. (1999). Toward a critical practice of leadership p. In L. Orozco (Ed.), Educational Leadership (pp. 3-15). Chicago: Coursewise Publishing.
- Ketelle, D. (2001, March). Leadership for public purpose: A framework for the future. Paper presented at the 24th Annual Conference of the Society of Educators and Scholars, Long Beach, CA.
- Molino, J. (2001, Winter). Campuses and the military mobilization impact and opportunities. The Military Educator, 7, 13-16.
- Rodríguez, F. J. (2001). Visionary international leadership: An interdisciplinary initiative for the new millennium [Review of the video program 24th Annual Conference of the Society of Educators and Scholars], Collaborative Educational Programs for the Americas CEPA, 24, 001-300.
- Rodríguez, F. J. (2003). Dean's leadership forum (Executive Summary No. 1). Fort Riley, Kansas: Fort Riley University.
- Williams, M. (2002). Army leaders report on Army transformation. Army AL&T, 29-30.
- Yates, A. C. (1999). Good leaders must first be good people. In L. Orozco (Ed.), Educational Leadership (pp. 46-49). Chicago: Coursewise Publishing.

## The Author

Federico J. Rodriguez, Ph.D., is Dean of Fort Riley University, Fort Riley, Kansas. Fort Riley University (FRU) is an integration of Army military education and training programs, post historical museum, transition services, and leadership education programs. He holds a B.S. from Idaho State University, a M.Ed. from Colorado State University, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Utah. He may be contacted at:

Fort Riley University  
Office of the Dean  
Bldg 217  
Fort Riley KS 66442-6824

(785) 239-6482 / 539-5723  
[rodriguezfj@riley.army.mil](mailto:rodriguezfj@riley.army.mil)